

# 2014 Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Prize



Major Peter John Badcoe VC

By Emma Hamilton

2013

# Major Peter John Badcoe

Service Number: 41400

By Emma Hamilton

Major Peter John Badcoe fought in the Vietnam War in the Thua Thien Province, Vietnam. He was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for his incredible leadership and gallantry during this war. This award was presented to his daughter, Kerry Badcoe by the Queen on the 16th October 1967. Major Badcoe was a prime example of an individual with the true ANZAC spirit who is an inspiration for all, to have valiance in the face of adversity. Peter Badcoe was born in Adelaide, South Australia and then trained at the Officer Cadet School in Portsea, Victoria, which now has a training block named in his memory. Due to his outstanding achievements, he is recognised in many states as an exemplary soldier in our country's history.



*Major Peter John Badcoe in Vietnam*

Peter John Badcock (Badcoe) was born on the 11th of January 1934 in Malvern, Adelaide, South Australia to Leslie Allen Badcock and Gladys Mary Allen May. He grew up in Adelaide and attended Adelaide Technical High School before joining the Public Service as a Clerk, then in 1952 served 52 weeks in the 16th National Service Training Battalion. On the 12th of July, Major Badcoe began his time at the Officer Cadet School in Portsea, Victoria and graduated on the 13th of December as a 2nd Lieutenant. Other companies that he was regimented to included; the 14th

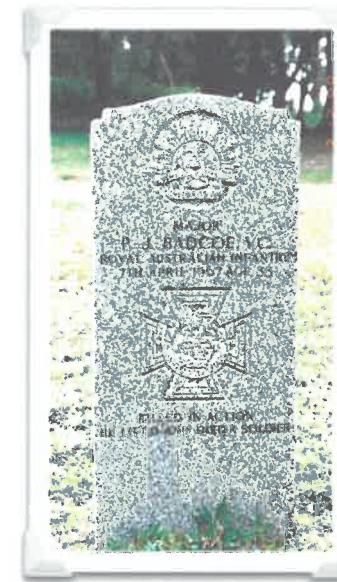
National Service Training Battalion, 1st and 4th Field Regiments, Directorate of Military Operations and Plans and the 1st and 103rd Field Battalions. After his third period in the 1st Field Regiment, Major Peter John Badcoe changed from Artillery to Infantry Corps advancing to a temporary Major on the 10th of August 1965, when he was posted in The New South Wales Infantry Centre in Ingleburn. On the 26th of May 1956, Peter Badcoe married Denise Maureen MacMahon in the Methodist Church, Manly, Sydney. Later they had three girls. In 1961 he changed his surname from Badcock to Badcoe. In August 1966, he chose to join the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam as a Sub-Sector Adviser.



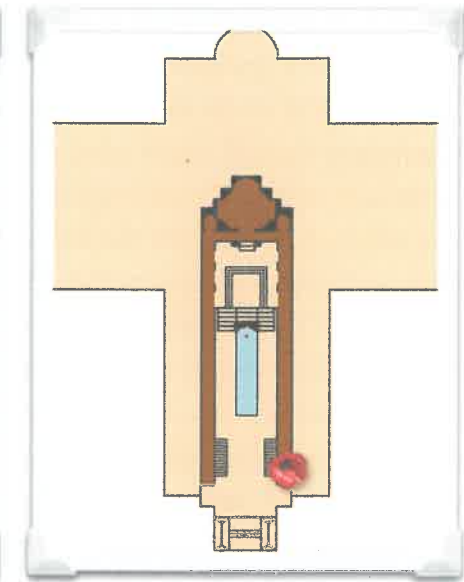
*A group portrait of the National Service Training Battalion including Major Badcoe*

Major Badcoe fought in three main battles that constituted his award of The Victoria Cross. In the Thua Thien Province these three battles were in the districts the Phu Thu, Quang Dien and Huong Tra. On the 23rd of February, in the Phu Thu District, Major Badcoe ran 600 meters alone across a battlefield to help a wounded American Health Officer and tended to his wounds. He then encouraged a platoon to successfully assault the enemy position and he then returned to collect the body of a deceased American adviser and return his body back to regional command post. On the 7th of March, in the Quang Dien District, Badcoe had left the command group when the group's vehicle had broken down. He joined another company to lead an assault over open ground whilst under attack to defeat a heavily protected enemy position. On the 7th of April, Badcoe and the 1st Army of the Republic of Vietnam Division Reaction Company were involved with a battle in the Huong Tra District. They were forced to withdraw to a cemetery when Major Badcoe and his radio operator were stranded 50 meters out, in an area of dense conflict. He ran back to his men and again encouraged them to advance, but they were stopped by heavy fire. Peter Badcoe got up to throw a grenade, but was stopped by his radio operator, the second time he rose to throw it, he was hit by machine gun fire, ending his life at age 33. In each of these events his bravery and leadership

were recognised to be of that unique only to Victoria Cross recipients. He reacted to a situation with the best intentions that he saw available, placing others' safety before his own. He is now buried in the Terendak Military Cemetery in Malacca, Malaysia. In November 1967, a room in the Australia and New Zealand Military club in Vietnam was dedicated to him. He has a monument in New South Wales commemorating him, and his name is in the Australian War Memorial on panel 4 in the Commemorative Area.



*Major Badcoe's grave in the Terendak Military Cemetery, Malaysia.*



*Peter John Badcoe is on panel 4 in the Commemorative Area in the Australian War Memorial.*

I believe that the ANZAC spirit relates to the fighting qualities of the Australian "diggers" of World War One that have been passed down through generations. The ANZAC spirit was formed in Gallipoli in World War One. Boys as young as 15 were fighting, anticipating that it would be right to fight for their King and country and war would be glorifying. The reality was quite the opposite. When the troops went to war, life was more difficult than imagined. There were floods, droughts, decaying food and waste, mud, vermin, no hygiene facilities and disease. They lived, worked and slept side by side forming bonds of companionship, respect, dependence, and perseverance to survive in a new, strange and testing environment where daily atrocities of war were common. The characteristics that the ANZAC spirit emulate are loyalty, selflessness, humor and endurance. The ANZAC spirit required loyalty and selflessness which was reiterated in the Vietnam War. Young men were fighting for their country and for oppressed humanity. 521 Australian servicemen and women died and 3 000 were wounded in the hope that the Vietnamese could regain freedom without the restrictions of a communist dictatorship. Soldiers, although in a difficult position, needed to have a good sense of humor to cope with the activities they were involved in, because the circumstances were often very traumatic. The Australian troops persevered through abominable conditions such as constant threat of infection and transmission of disease, food shortages, poor

water quality, lack of supplies, limited medical facilities, exposure to chemical poisoning and the invisible enemy in a hostile jungle environment. These "diggers" worked tirelessly to combat the barrage of inhumane conditions thrown at them.

Major Peter Badcoe was an exceptional soldier with a strong spirit of the ANZACs reflected in his actions and character. He displayed loyalty, selflessness, humor and endurance throughout his time in Vietnam. From the moment Badcoe had begun training in the National Service, he was loyal to his country. He committed the rest of his life to the Australian military, leading his troops into battle as an active leader and ultimately contributing his life to the war effort. When saving the American Health Officer and retrieving the American Adviser's body, Major Badcoe completely disregarded his own safety which could have ended his military occupation or his life prematurely. His selfless act saved the Health Officer. It is said that Peter Badcoe did not drink alcohol, smoke or use explicit language and had a dry sense of humor. He was very different to the other men and an excellent role model in that he was a quiet, gentle man and instead of dealing with the stress of war by consuming alcohol, he preferred to settle down with a military history book to read. Major Badcoe continually encouraged his troops with his ceaseless enthusiasm and ran across ground under heavy fire to help his fellow soldiers whilst enduring intolerable circumstances to save his company and capture the enemy. His medals include the Victoria Cross, Australian Active Service Medal 1945-1975 (Vietnam Clasp), Vietnam Medal, Australian Defence Medal, US Silver Star (oak leaf cluster), US Purple Heart, US Air Medal, Knight of the National Order of Vietnam, South Vietnam Gallantry Cross (palm, gold star and silver star), South Vietnam Campaign Medal (1960 clasp) and the South Vietnam Armed Forces Honour Medal-1st Class. They were sold at auction for \$480 000 to Kerry Stokes in collaboration with the South Australian Government in Sydney on the 20th May 2008 and were displayed in the Australian War Memorial in 2009.



*Part of Major Badcoe's collection of service medals earned in Vietnam.*

The ANZAC spirit may have been born in the trenches of World War One, but it has been perpetuated by soldiers such as Major Peter John Badcoe during the Vietnam War. People such as Badcoe, in lethal instances neglect thoughts of power, glory and reward. The ANZAC spirit is one of showing initiative, overcoming the odds and resilience. Major Badcoe earned his Victoria Cross for his outstanding leadership skills, bravery and endurance during his time in the Thua Thien Province, Vietnam.



*Major Peter John Badcoe.*

## Bibliography:

### Images:

SAMA 1129/4/1, Photograph of Major Peter Badcoe, 1960s, [online], [http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/sama1129/image\\_viewer.htm?BAD-00056,1](http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/sama1129/image_viewer.htm?BAD-00056,1), 17/8/2013

SAMA 1129/4/8, Photograph of Major Peter Badcoe in Vietnam, 1960s, [online], [http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/sama1129/image\\_viewer.htm?BAD-00068,1](http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/sama1129/image_viewer.htm?BAD-00068,1), 17/8/2013

P07803.001, 1955-1956, [online], <http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P07803.001>, 17/8/2013

Location on the Roll of Honour, date unknown, [online], [http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/roll\\_of\\_honour/person.asp?p=563426](http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/roll_of_honour/person.asp?p=563426), 18/8/2013

Grave of Major Peter Badcoe VC at Terendak Garrison Cemetery, date unknown, [online], <http://www.vvaa.org.au/terendak.htm>, 18/8/2013

Badcoe's medals and personal memoirs sold at auction, date unknown, [online], <http://alldownunder.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=60&t=360>, 18/8/2013

044465, C. 1966, [online], <http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/044465/>, 17/8/2013

### Information:

1967 'VC for Major killed in Vietnam.', The Canberra Times (ACT : 1926 - 1995), 17 October, p. 1, viewed 16 August, 2013, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/106992686>

Francesca Zilio, 2012, South Australian Museum Archives, South Australia, 16 August 2013, <<http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/sama1129/provlist.htm>>

Author unknown, 2013, Remembrance Driveway Committee, Sydney, Australia, 27 July 2013, <<http://www.remembrancedriveway.org.au/vc-citations/default.asp?ID=Badcoe>>

Author unknown, date unknown, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia, <<http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/vietnam.asp>>

Chris Baker, 2010, Warwickshire, United Kingdom, <<http://www.1914-1918.net/intrenches.htm>>

Chris Trueman, 2013, United Kingdom, <[http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/boy\\_soldiers.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/boy_soldiers.htm)>

Author unknown, date unknown, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia, <[http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/honours\\_and\\_awards/person.asp?p=369840](http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/honours_and_awards/person.asp?p=369840)>

*War hero's daughter journeys to Vietnam*, 19 May 2008, news report transcript, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Australia, <<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2007/s2249388.htm>>

Author unknown, date unknown, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia, <<http://www.awm.gov.au/people/524.asp>>